

NEW YORK, 10th November, 1860.

DEAR SIR:

The movements in some of the Southern States, with a view to the dissolution of the Union, have, as you may suppose, given us the greatest uneasiness, and I cannot refrain from writing to you on the subject. I do so, because you have been charged—unjustly I do not doubt—with favoring these movements, and because I sincerely think there is no Southern man who, by opposing them, can do more than yourself to keep the States together.

Nothing can be less defensible, on any ground of right or policy, than an attempt to break up the Union on account of the election of Mr. Lincoln. This is no time for elaborate argument. I wish only to make a few points, stating them in the briefest manner, and appealing to your patriotism to give them a calm and candid consideration.

1. The election of a President in strict conformity to the requirements of the Constitution can, by no process of reasoning, be deemed a just cause for secession. It would be the weakest of all positions as a ground for action. An overt act in palpable violation of the Constitution is the only justifiable cause for seeking to throw off the obligations of the federal compact.

2. The opinions of Mr. Lincoln, as a private individual, are not to be assumed as the guide of his official conduct as Chief Magistrate. At the hustings, as we all know, men often utter sentiments which they would be the last to carry into practice, when the responsibilities of government are thrown upon them, and they are acting under the obligation of an oath. There is every reason to believe that Mr. Lincoln will be forced, whatever may be his personal opinions, to separate himself from the ultraism of the party which has elected him.

3. The majority of both Houses of Congress will be opposed to the incoming administration, so that all hostile legislation in regard to the South, even if it should be attempted, would be impossible.

4. Our defeat is not due to the slavery question alone. Other and equally influential elements entered into the contest, and contributed largely to the result. The Democratic party was divided and disorganized by causes, which it is unnecessary to enumerate. Our discomfiture is due as much to ourselves as to our opponents.

5. The Republican party, from the very principles of its organization, must have a brief existence. It contains within itself the elements of an early dissolution. Its sectionalism alone must speedily demoralize and destroy it.

6. The Democrats of the North, since the adoption of the compromise measures of 1851, have stood up firmly in defence of your rights. Inconsistent as it may seem with our recent defeat, there is a better knowledge of our constitutional obligations, and a firmer determination to stand by you, than there ever has been heretofore. I know that the statute books of several of the States are dishonored by enactments designed to defeat the execution of the Act of Congress for the restoration of fugitive slaves. But these enactments are, and must continue to be utterly nugatory, and the Act of Congress will, under any administration, be carried into effect.

Under all these circumstances, nothing could be more unwise than a movement to dissolve the Union, even if it were not obnoxious to the graver objection, that there is nothing in the mere election of a President to warrant it.

But I put the question with you on other grounds. You cannot in honor desert us in our adversity. Your defeat is ours. We have fought your battles without regard to the political consequences to ourselves. It is neither chivalrous nor brave to draw off because the common adversary has gained a momentary advantage, and leave us to continue the contest for justice and right without the support we have given to you. There is but one course for magnanimous men, and that is to stand by us in our extremity. You cannot abandon us without subjecting yourselves to the imputation of unworthily deserting your friends and allies. I call on you as one, who knows, to bear testimony to the fidelity with which we have sustained you, and I appeal to you, as one keenly alive to the honorary obligation which such a fidelity imposes, to stand by us yourself, and to exert your powerful influence with others to avert a calamity which would be most disastrous to us all, and to the cause of free government throughout the world.

I have written to you with more freedom, perhaps, than my personal relations with you warrant. But I have the right, which every man possesses, to speak unreservedly to another, in whose patriotism and honor he has full confidence. Besides, the crisis demands frankness in speech and decision in action; and as a friend of the Union, believing that its dissolution would inevitably entail disaster and disgrace on us all—on those who should go out, as well as those who should remain in it—I hold it my duty to speak as boldly, and if need be, to act as fearlessly in its defence as others are speaking and acting for its destruction.

Let me then, once more, appeal to you and our Southern friends, as honorable men to remain with us and to meet with us, whatever emergencies of good or ill the coming Administration may bring with it. And let me assure you, on the fullest consideration, that any overt act in violation of your rights would be met here with as much promptitude, and with as stern a resistance, even to the death, as it would be by yourselves.

I am, dear Sir,

With sincere regard, truly yours,

(Signed) JOHN A. DIX.

To

with the respects of the author.

This letter was addressed to a distinguished Southern Statesman. It is put in print for private use, and is on no account to be published in the newspapers.



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